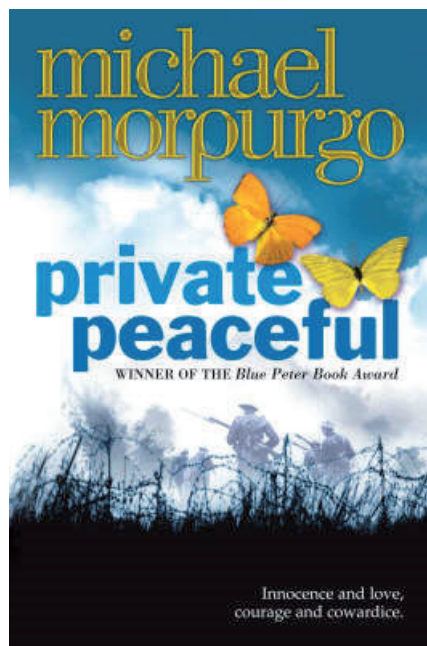


## Booktrust Teaching Sequence for: Private Peaceful by Michael Morpurgo



**Title:** Private Peaceful  
**Author:** Michael Morpurgo  
**First published:** 2003  
**Publisher:** HarperCollins Children's Books  
**ISBN:** 978-0007150076

**Ideal for use with:**  
Upper Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.

This guide provides ideas and suggestions for using this book to support the teaching of English, as well as History, Art, ICT and PSHE.

### About the book

Set in the First World War, *Private Peaceful* charts eight hours in the life of Tommo, a young soldier at the Front, as he looks back over the formative events of his life: his father's early death, his relationship with his loving mother and brothers, Big Joe and Charlie, and their beloved schoolfriend Molly – all set among an evocative and beautifully realised rural landscape. Passionate, beguiling and moving, the book is also an unflinching examination of the horrors of war and the injustice surrounding the execution of soldiers by firing squad, on the – often false – grounds of desertion or cowardice.

### About the author

Awarded an OBE in 2006, Michael Morpurgo is one of Britain's best loved writers for children. He has written over 100 books and won many prizes, including the Blue Peter Book Award for *Private Peaceful* which has also been adapted into an acclaimed stage play. He was the Children's Laureate for 2003-2005.

Michael founded the charity Farms for City Children in 1976 with his wife Clare, which aims to relieve the poverty of experience of young children from inner city areas by providing them with a week in which they work actively and purposefully on farms in the heart of the countryside. He lives in Devon and has three children and six grandchildren. His pets include four bantams, three hens and a cockrel called George.

### Find out more about Michael Morpurgo

- Visit Michael Morpurgo's website: [www.michaelmorpurgo.com](http://www.michaelmorpurgo.com)
- Find out more about Michael on the HarperCollins website: [www.harpercollins.co.uk/Authors/4121/michael-morpurgo](http://www.harpercollins.co.uk/Authors/4121/michael-morpurgo)
- Find out about Farms for City Children: [www.farms4citychildren.co.uk](http://www.farms4citychildren.co.uk)
- Read about Michael's time as Children's Laureate: [www.childrenslaureate.org.uk](http://www.childrenslaureate.org.uk)
- Watch a video of a Scottish Book Trust Authors Live event: [www.scottishbooktrust.com/authors-live-with-michael-morpur](http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/authors-live-with-michael-morpur)
- Read a Booktrust feature about Michael's work: [www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk/show/feature/Michael-Morpurgo:-The-Man-and-the-Writer](http://www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk/show/feature/Michael-Morpurgo:-The-Man-and-the-Writer)



## Synopsis

The book follows the life of the Peaceful brothers, Tommo and Charlie, from growing up in rural England to fighting on the battlefields of the First World War.

Tommo looks up to his older brother Charlie, who is always there to look after him. The age gap between them causes difficulties for Tommo when Charlie moves away from the world of childhood and school, and begins to take on an adult role in the family, particularly as he begins a relationship with Molly, whom both brothers love. When Charlie is forced to join up, Tommo enlists too, although he is underage.

Charlie quickly makes an enemy of Sergeant Hanley by challenging his authority and refusing to follow what Charlie sees as the inhuman rules of army life. However, his courage and resilience in battle soon earn him the respect of the other members of his company. Amidst the horrors of the trenches he continues to be a big brother to Tommo and even to his comrades.

Chance brings Sergeant Hanley back to command them and at a crucial point in an attack, Charlie refuses to leave Tommo who is injured and to obey what he sees as Hanley's suicidal order to advance. Charlie is arrested and subsequently executed for cowardice.

## Themes and issues

- **Remembrance** and the responsibility we have to remember
- **The power exerted by authority** over individual lives
- **Relationships** and the different bonds created by family, friends and authority
- **Family** and the changing relationships between siblings
- **Death**
- **War** – the physical and mental horrors of the trenches

## Characters

- **Tommo**, the narrator
- **Charlie**, his eldest brother
- **Joe**, the oldest brother, brain-damaged by meningitis
- **Molly**, a childhood friend of both boys; ultimately Charlie's wife
- **Mother**
- **The colonel**, for whom the boy's father worked until he was killed in an accident, owner of the tied cottage and therefore able to exert influence on the lives of the Peaceful family
- **Grandma Wolf**, a rather sinister 'storybook' character who appears important in Tommo and Charlie's younger lives but whom they realise as they get older has no real power over their family
- **Sergeant Hanley**, the cruel sergeant who does not treat his soldiers as human beings; Charlie's adversary and his antithesis
- **Mr Munnings**, school teacher and precursor of Sergeant Hanley

## Settings

The main narrative takes place in pre-war rural Devon and war-torn France and Belgium.

## Structure

There are two narratives; the **framing narrative** which is written in the present tense and takes place during one night and the **main narrative** which is mostly past tense but moves to present tense at key moments.

Each chapter is headed with a time between five past ten in the evening and one minute to six the following morning. The first part of each chapter continues the framing narrative and provides reflective comments and links between the recollections of the main narrative.

The main narrative recounts the life story of the Peaceful brothers as remembered by Tommo Peaceful. This continues chronologically, but is always coloured by the allusions to imminent death in the framing narrative. This main narrative is in two parts:

## Part One

- **Opening:** Father's death for which Tommo feels responsible, Tommo's first day at school
- **Inciting moment:** Tommo gets into a fight at school with a boy who is insulting Joe, Charlie defends him and is beaten by the teacher for fighting. Molly declares her solidarity and becomes their friend.
- **Development:** Tommo, Molly and Charlie grow up learning through experience about the rules that govern their lives because of their social position.
- **Climax:** Tommo discovers that, despite their friendship being forbidden by the colonel and Molly's family, Charlie and Molly have been seeing each other. Tommo feels that 'in finding each other, [they] had deserted me.'
- **Denouement:** Molly is pregnant. She and Charlie marry.
- **Ending:** Charlie has to enlist, Tommo persuades Molly that he should also enlist to keep his brother out of trouble.

## Part Two

- **Opening:** Training in England and travelling to Belgium.
- **Inciting moment:** Charlie, defending Tommo, clashes with Sergeant Hanley.
- **Development:** Charlie proves his worth as a brother, friend and soldier in the horrors of the trenches.
- **Climax:** In a devastating battle, Charlie chooses to stay with the injured Tommo and refuses to obey Hanley's order to advance.
- **Denouement:** We discover that the framing narrative has been Tommo waiting, not for his own death but that of Charlie who is being executed at dawn for cowardice.
- **Ending:** Tommo finally talks to Charlie about their father's death and promises to take responsibility for Molly and the baby. But he remains in Belgium anticipating a march to the battle of the Somme. Our knowledge as a reader of what this may mean challenges us to accept an ending in which nothing can be resolved. There can be only 'horror and regret and great

sadness' and for Tommo (and of course the active reader) a greater understanding of self.

The parallels between the parts of the book are emphasised by the use of images and symbols including **birds, crows, poaching, stars** and **mud**.

*They've gone now and I'm alone at last. I have the whole night ahead of me and I won't waste a single moment of it... I want tonight to be long, as long as my life...*



## Narration and Point of View

The story is narrated in the first person by Tommo. The framing narrative makes it clear that his recollections are coloured by the imminence of death and this influences our reading. We know that the recollections will be significant to the framing narrative and therefore can begin to identify themes, parallels and symbols.

The device of the framing narrative also enables the early lives of the Peaceful boys to be given both adult and child perspectives. We see Charlie through the loving and admiring eyes of Tommo who puts his 'scrapes' into context and reveals a strong sense of fair play and loyalty. Other views of Charlie are revealed through minor characters, but these are overridden for Tommo by a growing respect for Charlie's steadfastness.

The final denouement may make us reconsider the narrator's intention and reliability.

## Teaching suggestions

## Literacy ideas



## Talking about story openings

- The opening of *Private Peaceful* raises more questions than it answers. Ask pupils to work in pairs to write a list of questions provoked by the opening. How do these affect them as a reader?
- Read the opening of another book by Michael Morpurgo, such as *Kensuke's Kingdom* (see p. 7 for suggestions). Discuss the openings of the two books: how do they compare with each other?
- Read the first chapter of the book. Talk about the key events and consider why they have been included in this opening chapter. What do you think the likely themes of the book might be?
- Draw attention to the structure of the narrative, which allows for two viewpoints, the child and the reflective adult. Discuss how these two narratives work side by side.

## Timelines: exploring narrative structure and chronology

- Working in groups or as a whole class, map out the story on two time lines, one for the framing story which takes place over a night, and one for the main narrative which spans Tommo's life from 5-17. Try doing this by writing key events on post-it notes, which can then be arranged in different sequences. Talk about the links and parallels between the two stories.
- Use your timeline as a basic framework to investigate and mark out other events and changes – for example, track the changing role of the brothers within the Peaceful family, or the changes to the family's fortunes.

- Try using the drama technique of parallel scenes to explore the connections between two parts of the story – for example a scene with Mr Munnings could be played alongside a scene with Sergeant Hanley.

## Investigating character: Who is Private Peaceful?

- Discuss who the Private Peaceful of the title might be - Tommo or Charlie? It implies one person, but in fact might refer to both of them. Talk about why this might be an appropriate title.
- Ask pupils to map out the development of the relationship between the brothers, and talk about how it changes. Note how the book starts with Charlie promising, 'I'll look after you' and the assertion by Tommo, 'That I do believe because he always has.'
- Chart Tommo's development as he begins to find the age gap difficult and he becomes jealous of Charlie's move into the adult world. Notice how, after much persuading, Tommo's argument that he will look after Charlie – 'who's always getting himself into nasty scrapes' – is the one which convinces Molly that Tommo should enlist with Charlie. Charlie continues to protect Tommo, which gets him into trouble, but Tommo sticks by him too. Eventually in battle Charlie becomes a big brother to everyone.
- Collect ideas and evidence in reading journals about how character is revealed through dialogue, action and description, including setting and imagery, in *Private Peaceful*.
- As a group, share your findings, and discuss what you have discovered about Morpurgo as a writer. What techniques does he use to define his characters? How convincing are they? Whose eyes are we seeing them through?

## Charlie on trial: exploring viewpoints and responses

- Explore the character of Charlie from the viewpoint of the different characters. Collect evidence from the text that presents him in different lights. Do you think all the points of view are equally valid?
- Enact the trial scene, with characters from Charlie's past appearing as witnesses, giving evidence about his character. What would they say about him and why?
- Discuss whether you think Tommo is a reliable witness. Can we trust him as a narrator? What motivations might he have for presenting only one side of Charlie's story?

## Exploring issues

- Consider the attitudes of different characters to authority. Discuss how Mother demonstrates a clear idea of what is right and wrong, from the incident with the rabbit droppings to her encounters with Grandma Wolf and the Colonel.
- Compare her reactions to authority with those of Charlie. Think about the motivations of the characters. What are they prepared to risk losing for standing by their convictions? What are the consequences (or possible consequences) of their choices and actions?
- Use the technique of **forum theatre** to explore these choices: have a small group act out a scene in which Charlie confronts and disobeys Sergeant Hanley. The actors and the audience are able to stop the action at any time to ask for advice, to offer suggestions or to swap places with each other.

## History ideas

### Talking about war

- Talk about the origins of *Private Peaceful*, which Michael Morpurgo reveals as interviews with three farm boy veterans. He chooses to call his narrator Tommo, a name that implies an everyman character: Anna, the girl in France, emphasises this when she says: 'Every English soldier is called Tommy.' To what extent do you think *Private Peaceful* is a universal story?
- Discuss the following questions:
  - » What different attitudes towards war do different characters demonstrate e.g. the recruiting agent, the colonel, Charlie and Tommo
  - » What do you think Morpurgo's own attitude is to war?
  - » How are his values and beliefs shown through the presentation of the characters and events?
  - » What knowledge do we as readers bring to the story and how does it affect our reading of it?
- Finally, ask pupils to consider how their feelings about war have changed as a result of reading this book.

### Working with historical evidence

- From the book jacket, read 'A Soldier's Declaration' and the quotation from Morpurgo which cites his inspiration and reasons for writing the book.
- Working from this starting point, divide the class into groups and ask each group to use different sources to find out some specific information about the war. For example, they could look for:

- » Facts about the poet Siegfried Sassoon
  - » Data about men shot for cowardice
  - » Propaganda (the Colonel cites 'patriotic duty')
  - » Numbers killed and the effect on families
  - » Information about wartime at home
  - » War poetry which echoes themes in the book
- Now regroup pupils using the **jigsaw strategy** where a pupil from one group comes together with pupils from each of the other groups, to form a new group, bringing the evidence they have gathered with them
  - Ask groups to talk about how far the novel contains factual information which accurately reflects historical events. Consider Morpurgo's motivations for writing the book, and how far his audience and the context in which he was writing might affect the accuracy of the novel.
  - Talk about how useful the book might be to a historian studying the First World War.

### The decision to go to war: exploring issues through role-play

- Talk about Charlie's attitude to the war. His response when he hears about those who have enlisted is: 'More fool them. I'm not going, not ever. I'll shoot a rat because it might bite me. I'll shoot a rabbit because I can eat it. Why should I ever want to shoot a German? Never even met a German.' **Hot-seat** Charlie to consider his feelings and responses.
- Talk about Tommo's attitude to the war. He is unsure about his motivation and reflects on the many influences that inform his decision to go to war: staying with Charlie; adventure; the stirring call to arms; his love for his family and countryside; the taunts of cowardice from the old woman in the town. You could also hot-seat Tommo to compare his feelings to Charlie's.

- Now ask pupils to take on the roles of the other characters and consider their motivation for persuading Charlie and Tommo to go to war or to remain at home. As well as the characters in the book, other villagers could be given a voice e.g. a mother whose son has already joined up. Use evidence from the text as the starting point for a role-play.
- The technique of **conscience alley** could be used to explore the dilemma faced by Tommo. The class forms two lines facing each other, and one person taking the role of Tommo, walks between the lines as each member of the group speaks their advice. You could organise this so that those on one side give opposing advice to those on the other. When the person playing Tommo reaches the end of the 'alley' they must make their decision.
- Alternatively try freeze-framing key moments on the journey to war, such as taking leave of familiar places, family and friends or onboard the train, and then using the technique of **thought-tracking**. In turn, tap each person on the shoulder and ask them to speak their thoughts and feelings aloud – or ask another member of the class to speak their thoughts for them

### PSHE ideas

#### Talking about character: heroes and villains

- Relate your exploration of character to a discussion of heroes, or role models. Who do pupils most admire in the story? Make a list of qualities that these characters demonstrate that they admire.
- Talk about the behaviour of characters like Mr Munnings, Sergeant Hanley, the Colonel and Grandma Wolf. What different kinds of bullying behaviour do these characters demonstrate? What actions can be taken to stop it? Identification and comparison of easy and difficult options could lead

pupils to reflect on similar incidents and responses in their own lives.

- Working in role, pupils could explore critical moments in the story and the different outcomes that might arise from changing characters' responses to a particular situation.

## Art ideas

### Design a book cover

- Talk about the themes of the book and the strong visual images used by Morpurgo throughout. Make a list of recurring images: you might think of birds, stars or mud.
- Ask pupils to design a book cover for *Private Peaceful* that does not depict the war overtly, but uses ideas or images from the book to convey the mood or themes.

## Visual language

- Discuss how Morpurgo uses language to create strong visual and emotional pictures. Talk about some of the different techniques he uses.
- Now choose one of the very visual passages of the book (eg. pp. 8-9, p.56, p.84, p.86 p.104, p.138) to illustrate. Provide a range of different materials, and ask pupils to think about using different techniques such as colour and shape to convey mood.

*Tonight, more than any other night  
of my life, I want to feel alive.*

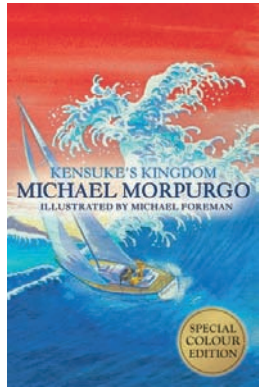


## ICT ideas

### Multimedia presentation

- Challenge pupils to create a multimedia presentation to inform another class about the First World War and the origins of Remembrance Day.
- Use reference books and the internet to research additional information. Incorporate music, sounds, images, words, spoken phrases, poems and extracts from the text. You could also include some of the images and symbols used by Morpurgo in the book.

## More great books by Michael Morpurgo

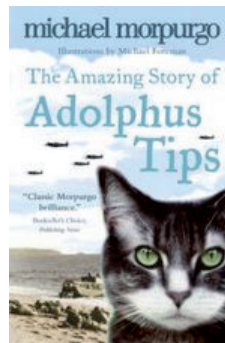


### Kensuke's Kingdom (Egmont)

Michael is hungry, lonely and scared when he is washed up on a seemingly deserted island. He soon discovers another inhabitant - Kensuke, a former Japanese soldier - who, although initially unfriendly, provides Michael with food and water. Gradually, a strong bond develops between the two castaways. This is a beautifully written tale of an exceptional friendship which survives beyond the boundaries of culture and language.

### The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips (HarperCollins)

It's the Second World War and 12-year-old Lily's Devon village is evacuated so that American troops can practise for the D-Day landings on the beach at Slapton Sands. Two American soldiers befriend her and try to help her find her beloved cat Tips, who has been left behind in the upheaval. Moving from the present day to wartime diary and back again, this ultimately uplifting novel illuminates the effects of these fateful events on the lives of those involved and the generations that followed.

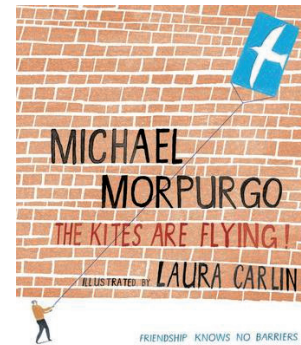


### Singing for Mrs Pettigrew: A Storymaker's Journey (Walker)

This 'sponge-sandwich-cake book' collects short stories and essays that illustrate Morpurgo's approach to storytelling. Here, he reveals his diverse sources of inspiration, which come from his own life, history, reading and from negative as well as positive experiences. He also encourages writers of all ages to nurture the seeds of creativity we all hold within us.



### The Kites are Flying (Walker)



When television reporter Max visits communities on either side of a dividing wall in the West Bank, his intention is to give an objective view of life for both Jews and Palestinians. He does not expect to find a friend; least of all Said, mute since the death of his older brother. As Max investigates, Said makes kites and sends them flying over the wall to a young girl on the other side. This dual narrative tale of a modern day conflict, illustrated by Laura Carlin, is both tragic and joyful.

### The Sleeping Sword (Egmont)

This Arthurian tale, set in the Scilly Isles, is a story within a story. Ten-year-old Bun Bendle, blinded in a freak accident, falls into a huge hole in one of his father's fields. The hole is, in fact, an ancient tomb hiding a remarkably well-preserved sword and shield. When Bun takes hold of the sword, an incredible power surges through his whole body and his life is changed forever. A compelling tale that illustrates beautifully the value of friendship, family and positive thinking.



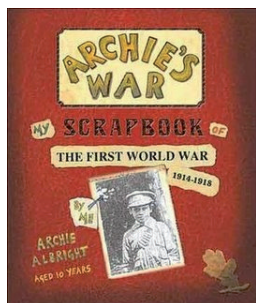
### Toro! Toro! (HarperCollins)



Accompanied by illustrations by Michael Foreman, this is the story of Antonio, who as a small boy in 1936, saves the life of his favourite bull, destined for the bullring, by taking him out into the hills. In doing so, Antonio also saves his own life, avoiding the attack on his village by the Nazis that kills his whole family. Readers will empathise with Antonio whilst acquiring an understanding of the Spanish Civil War - a conflict which has rarely been made the subject of children's literature.

## Further reading about the First World War

### For Key Stage 2



#### Archie's War by Marcia Williams (Walker)

In 1914, just before the outbreak of the First World War, Archie is sent a scrapbook in the post by his Uncle Colin. In the years that follow we experience life through Archie's eyes and learn about the war and daily life through a collage of strip comics, doodles, drawings, mementos, photos, thoughts, jokes and more, giving an insight into what it was like being a child at this important moment in history.

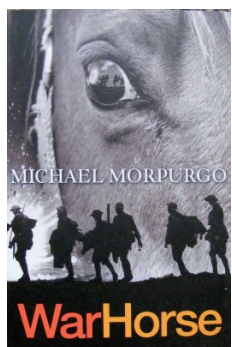
#### The Silver Donkey by Sonya Hartnett (Walker)

In French woodland, sisters Coco and Marcelle find a blind English deserter from the front, and try to help him to find his way back home. In return for their kindness, the soldier tells them marvellous tales connected to the keepsake he carries in his pocket: a tiny silver donkey. Over time, the sisters begin to understand the truth about the silver donkey and what it means to him.

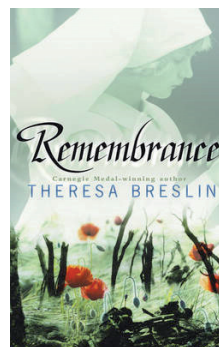


#### War Horse by Michael Morpurgo (Egmont)

Joey is a young farm horse, sold to the army at the beginning of the First World War. Through his eyes the reader experiences the devastation of the Western Front, his capture by the Germans and his entrapment in No Man's Land. Joey's tremendous courage touches soldiers of both armies; in turn, he experiences warmth and kindness amid the carnage of war and homesickness for his old life on the farm. A sequel, *Farm Boy* tells the story of what happens to Joey next.



### For Key Stage 3



#### Remembrance by Theresa Breslin (Corgi)

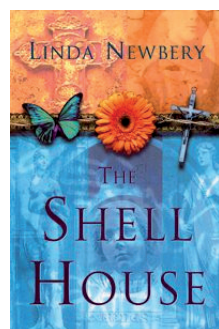
The events of the First World War are seen through the eyes of a group of teenagers from two Scottish families from very different social backgrounds. Charlotte and Maggie train as nurses and are sent to France; Francis struggles with his conscience; whilst John, Malcolm and Alex are seduced by the glories of war. Breslin's beautiful prose gives the harrowing sights and sounds of war a human edge.

#### The Foreshadowing by Marcus Sedgwick (Orion)

The daughter of a prosperous doctor, 17 year-old Sasha lives an outwardly sheltered life, but she is haunted by premonitions. When her brothers go off to fight in the Great War, Sasha foresees the horrors of the Somme. Despite her father's lack of faith, she travels to France as a nurse in an attempt to rescue her brother from a terrible death - but can she change the future?



#### The Shell House by Linda Newbery (Red Fox)



The Shell House of the title is Graveney Hall, a beautiful stately home that burned down during the First World War. The house also links the story of Greg, who is photographing the hall for an A-Level project, with that of Edmund, the Graveney family's last heir, who disappeared mysteriously in 1917. Though separated by many years, the two characters are connected by their struggles to understand faith, intolerance and their own sexuality.

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